

# Christ Wailing Over Jerusalem

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**"This incident is an allegory. The soul of each one amongst  
us is such a Jerusalem. The soul has its history of shame or  
of faithfulness, and its prophecy of triumph or of doom, just  
as Jerusalem had. Jerusalem had  
warnings.. Jerusalem found that it was so, and so shall all  
men who persist in defying the mercy of God which calleth  
us to repentance."**

**"And when He drew nigh, He saw the city and wailed over it, saying, ' If  
thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that  
belong to thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes.'" —LUKE xix. 41.**

TO-DAY is Palm Sunday, and the verse which I have read to you narrates its central incident. The humble triumph of the Entry into Jerusalem recalled that bright period of Christ's early ministry which has been called "the Galilaean spring." In those days He had moved daily amid the exuberant enthusiasm of the multitudes, whom He enriched with the fresh glory of that teaching which was as a dayspring from on high. But those days were long past. The hostility of Priests and Pharisees, "with fierce lies maddening the blind multitude," had driven Him into flight and exile. They, from the first, in the ignorance of their fancied wisdom, in the falsity of their self-blinding formalism, had utterly rejected Him. The last sphere of His work had been in Jerusalem; and from Jerusalem the Priests had driven Him—excommunicated, and with a price upon His head. He had gone into deep and much-imperilled retirement to a little obscure village called Ephraim, some twenty miles from Jerusalem, on the edge of the wilderness. Nor could He venture to leave His hiding-place till, from the conical hill of Ephraim, he saw the crowds of Galilean pilgrims streaming down the Jordan Valley to the Great Feast. Among them He would be safe. He started on the journey which He well knew would end in death. Of the incidents on the way, and at Jericho, and at Bethany, I cannot now

speaking. At early morning He started from the home of Martha and Mary and Lazarus, and passing under the palm groves of Bethany reached the fig-gardens of Bethphage, and sent two of His disciples for the ass's colt. They mounted Him on it, and covered it with their garments. Among the lowly pilgrims from Galilee it was a moment of intense expectation. They burst into rapturous hosannas; they tapestried the mountain-path with their upper robes; they kept tearing down the green boughs of fig and olive and walnut, to strew them before His feet. So the humble, joyous procession streamed up the Mount of Olives, through green fields and shady trees, to a platform of smooth rock, where the road sweeps round the shoulder of the hill to the northward. At that spot the city of Jerusalem bursts suddenly upon the view through the transparent atmosphere, rising out of the deep umbrageous valleys which surrounded it. The glorious guilty city—the city of ten thousand memories—stood before Him in the morning sunlight, with its "imperial mantle of proud towers." There were the ancient impregnable walls; there the Asmonsean Palace, and the palace of the High-Priest; and the new palace built by Herod the Great, with its voluptuous splendour, with its colossal wings of white marble, its sculptured porticoes, its many-coloured marbles, its fountains and reservoirs and green promenades haunted by flights of doves. There, above all, on its vast platform, with its pinnacles and gilded roofs, a mass of gold and snow, and with its alternate red and white marbles, recalling the crest and hollow of the sea-waves, reflecting the morning light in such fiery splendour as to force the spectator to avert his glance, there rose the Temple—that most ancient and venerable shrine in all the world—the emblem of God's Presence among mankind, where, of old, the Shechinah had gleamed between the outspread wings of the golden cherubim. Confident in its immemorial sanctity the people had been wont to exclaim of old with passionate confidence, "The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these!" Surely at a spectacle so glorious the heart of the Messiah-King would burn within Him as He rode on in majesty among the hallelujahs and hosannas of impassioned hopes! On those roofs King David had strung his golden harp. Hither the Queen of the South had come to see the glory of Solomon. From before those walls, in the days of good Hezekiah, the host of Sennacherib had melted away, when—

"The Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast. And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed ; And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd heavy and chill, And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever stood still."

There the young had shouted, and the old men wept, when the new Temple of the returned exiles began to rise from its desolation. There it had been splendidly re-dedicated by the hero Maccabee. What a rush of glorious emotions the place aroused as Jesus paused at the sight, and the palm-waving, carolling, pilgrims paused, expectant, around Him ! But instead of the exultant strain, instead of the promise of glorious emancipation which they

expected, a rush of pity and anguish shook the Saviour's soul—He wailed aloud. It is the only instance in His life where this is recorded of Him. We are told that He sighed—*ecrrevagev*—when He opened the blind man's eyes; and that He shed silent tears—*eSdicpva-ev*—by the grave of Lazarus; but we are told that, at this moment only in all His life—*€Klavcrev*—' He wailed aloud !'

2. Why did He wail at this glorious spectacle? Was not Jerusalem the most religious city in the world ? wholly devoted to religion ? destined to the furtherance of religion ? Could not its Temple service number its 40,000 Priests, and its endless army of white-robed Levites ? Were not its services announced morning and evening with the blast of silver trumpets? Did He not see the golden vine which twined over its entrance door, laden with its priceless clusters of pure and massive gold ? Was not its great altar blazing and smoking at that moment with its morning sacrifice? Did not its High-Priest, in his golden vestments and his breastplate, 'ardent with gems oracular,' go gleaming into its Holiest Place once every year with the blood of Atonement and the golden censer in his hand ? Were not some 2,000,000 pilgrims from every region of the world, with Gentile proselytes among them, streaming, on that very day, to its Paschal festival ? Ah, yes! there was gorgeous ritual enough, and more than enough, but no righteousness; religiosity enough, but no religion pure and undefiled. The nations had never truly responded to the appeal of all her Prophets, " To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me ? saith the Lord. Incense is an abomination unto Me. Your new moons and Sabbaths, I am weary to bear them. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well." Careful about the ablutions of cups and platters, within they were full of extortion and wickedness. Their religious scrupulosity was a glistening sepulchre, a hollow sham ; and while they were priding themselves on their own righteousness and despising others, they were on the very verge of the most awful sin the world has ever witnessed, the crucifixion of the Lord of life! Therefore the doom of ruin was passed on them by the lips of love. Within the lifetime of some who heard it, it was fulfilled in throes of agony more terrible than any known to history. Their city was besieged. They were slaughtered till the streets ran with blood. They were crucified by thousands till wood failed for crosses. Their city became an unrecognisable heap of mounded graves. Their history was ended. Their name obliterated. Their nation exiled. Their house desolate.

" Vengeance, thy fiery wing their race pursued,  
Thy thirsty poniard blushed with infant blood ;  
She saw her sons by dubious slaughter fall,  
And war without, and death within the wall.  
Wide-wasting Plague, gaunt Famine, mad Despair,

And dire Debate and clamorous Strife was there;  
Love, strong as Death, retain'd his might no more,  
And the pale parent drank her children's gore !  
But heavier far the fettered captive's doom  
To glut with sighs the iron ear of Rome,  
To flesh the lion's ravenous jaws, or feel  
The sportive fury of the fencer's steel,  
Or pant, deep-plunged beneath the sultry mine,  
For the light airs of balmy Palestine."

So terribly was the doom fulfilled !

8. My friends, this awful and pathetic incident of Palm Sunday is no mere historic picture; it is also an allegory. It has for us a most solemn warning. The soul of each one among us is such a Jerusalem. The glory of God's image is upon us, and the sign of redemption visibly marked upon our foreheads. And on each heart is inscribed a history and a prophecy—a history of shame or of faithfulness; a prophecy of triumph or of doom. Just as Jerusalem might have welcomed her Messiah-King, and have been, for all ages, "the joy of the whole earth," so for each soul here there might be an unimaginable beauty. But also for each one of us there may be a failure as ghastly, a doom as overwhelming as that which befell the once Holy City. Have we not warning enough ? How many thousands of men and women do we see sitting in the hopeless ruins of their life ? That sodden drunkard—a curse to himself and to his family—who has sacrificed the glory of his manhood and the hopes of his immortality to a degrading and selfish appetite:—that man whose bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the grave :—that man whose heart is livid with petty spitefulness, black with envy, hatred, and lies:—yea, and even that man who, "with ghastly smooth life dead at heart," poses as a religious person, and wears the broad phylacteries of the Pharisee, while he is more essentially ignoble even than the worldling — have *they* known the hour of their visitation ? Is the doom of the guilty city more terrific than that of guilty men ? of those who for their iniquities pass into the cell of the lunatic, or lie down in the grave of the suicide ? of those who after some ghastly transgression step on the scaffold to forfeit their shamed lives ? of those who clutch to the last the mask of the hypocrite, and die and make no sign ? Ah ! to all these Christ is now saying, or has said, " If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace!—but now they are hid from thine eyes." " *But now.* ""—Ah, yes !

" There is an hour, and Justice marks the date,  
For long-enduring clemency to wait;

That hour elapsed, the incurable revolt  
Is punish'd, and down comes the thunderbolt!"

Then Iniquity has played her part and Vengeance leaps upon the stage. " Though this day be like yesterday," says an old divine, " and to-morrow like to-day, yet one day will come for all, and then woe, woe, woe, and nothing but darkness; and though God came not to Adam till the evening, yet He came; although the fire fell not upon Sodom until evening, yet it fell; and so comes the Judge, though He be not yet come; though He hath leaden feet, He hath iron hands." But when the terrible " too late " has been pronounced, then " all the furies of hell leap upon the self-ruined soul. Thought calleth to Fear, Fear whistleth to Horror, Horror beckoneth to Despair. One saith that she cometh from this sin and another from that. Irons are laid upon his body like a prisoner, all his lights are put out at once." It may sound too terrible, yet to the hardened, depraved, defiant sinner our God *is* a consuming fire; and the adamantine laws to which a bad man subjects himself when he has turned his back upon God, are " stern as fate, inexorable as tyranny, merciless as death, with no ear to hear, no heart for pity, no arm to save." The city of Jerusalem found it so to be, and so shall all men who, day after day, and year by year, persist in rejecting and defying that mercy of God which calleth us to repentance.

4. Our position, therefore, if we be wicked and impenitent, is exactly that of the city over which Jesus wailed on that first Palm Sunday. All the glory, all the privileges which it had abused were God's gift. Without Him we too are nothing, and less than nothing.

" We are children of splendour and flame,  
Of shuddering, also, and tears;  
Magnificent out of the dust we came,  
And abject from the spheres."

God leaves to our free will the control of our destinies :

" Our actions travel with us from afar,  
And what we have been, makes us what we are."

God is ever saying to us, day by day, " Behold, I set before thee this day life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life." He hath set fire and water before thee: thou mayest stretch forth thy hand unto whichever thou wilt. And oh! the difference! " The little more, and how much it is; the little less, and how far away !"" The destinies of our life, unless we be serious and faithful in listening to the voice of Christ, are often decided by things which



seem very small. An apparently infinitesimal divergence may become step by step an infinite separation.

" Alas, how easily things go wrong !  
A word too much, and a look too long,  
And there cometh a mist, a weeping rain,  
And life is never the same again !"

Palm Sunday, then, and the wail of Christ over Jerusalem as it gleamed before Him in the self- satisfied wickedness of sham religion, has for us an awful lesson, a solemn reminder. It is not too late for us yet to listen to the voice of Christ; the day for us is not yet wholly over on which we may still know the things which belong unto our peace : not yet —but the sun is speedily setting, and none knows how soon for us the night may fall. Those are very tremendous words, however much we may try to soften them down, which say, " Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all My reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." Yet, are those words more terrible than the word of the Lord of love ?—" But now they are hid from thine eyes, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." Alas! " Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore, too often the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Yes, "it is not that God changeth His mercy, but we change our capacity for mercy; and it were just as absurd for a man who sees a river before him to hope it may be dry land, and so plunge into it and be drowned, as it is for a man who sees wrath written in revelation against his way of life to hope it may not be wrath, but forgiveness." We are all far too apt to neglect the warnings of Scripture; and, while we defy its exhortations, to clutch at its promises. But oh! when we think of the fate of God's once glorious Temple, and of God's once chosen people, let us not be high-minded, but fear! Let us wrestle, and watch, and pray ! Then indeed, but only then, may we in deepest humility, with bent head and beseeching hand, expect the fulfilment of those gracious words, "But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil"; and of those gracious words, " But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings "; and of those most gracious, most tender words ever spoken even by the lips of love, " Come unto Me, all ye that are

weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"; and " Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "Turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel ? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord."